

A HARD CASE NO. 2453

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1896
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
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*“For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.
In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;
then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction,
that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man.
He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.”
Job 33:14-18*

HOW persevering is divine love! “God speaketh once.” I have heard many a father say to his child, “Do not let me have to speak to you again.” But the great Father has to speak again, and when it is written, “God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not,” we see how great is the stubbornness of the human heart, and we also see the gentleness of divine love.

When Elihu said, “God speaketh once, yea twice,” he meant that the Lord speaks repeatedly. Divine lovingkindness has many voices. God often speaks to us in our childhood. Some of us hardly remember when first our Lord called us, as He called Samuel, saying, “Samuel, Samuel,” and each for himself answered, “Here am I.”

We cannot forget the voices of our youth and boyhood—the messages that the Lord sent to us through loving parents and kind-hearted teachers, or the direct admonitions of the Holy Spirit. God spoke to us, and spoke to us again, and spoke to us yet again, but we regarded not His voice. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear, and we were among those who would not hear even that voice to which heaven and earth attend, that voice which even the dead will one day hear, when they that hear shall live.

Do we not admire the great patience of God with us? I am sure we ought to do so, and if we do, it will make us repent of our negligence of the divine voice, so that, henceforth, we shall say with David, “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee,” note that, “*my heart* said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek.” Oh, for the quick ear to catch the faintest sound of the divine voice! Oh, for a ready heart, waiting for those tender condescending admonitions which the Lord is waiting to speak to us!

But God has voices which He uses in such a way that men must and shall hear. There is not only the patience of love, but there is also the omnipotence of love. God does not merely attempt to make men hear, but He succeeds in doing it. When the splendor of His love makes bare His holy arm, and He puts forth all His force, the unwilling heart is made willing in the day of His power, the rebel spirit is led in chains of love, a willing captive to His conquering Lord.

I am going now to speak somewhat of that matter, and keeping to our text, I want to say, first, that *man is very hard to influence for good*. His ear has to be opened, his heart has to be broken off from its evil purposes, his pride has to be conquered, there are many things to be done before men are fully influenced to their eternal salvation.

Then, secondly, *God knows how to come at them*. By day or by night, by voices heard when they are in the midst of their business, or “in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.” Thirdly,

thus the Lord accomplishes great purposes for men, “That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.”

I. So, then, first, let us begin with what is a very humbling consideration, namely, that **MAN IS VERY HARD TO INFLUENCE FOR GOOD.**

This is true now, and it always has been true, since sin entered the world, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.” Still is the Savior’s sad complaint most true of very many, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” The noblest, the tenderest, the most potent forces spend themselves in vain upon the heart of man. It is hard as the nether millstone, it is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” It does not seem, by nature, to be more amenable to heavenly influences than is the deaf adder to the voice of the charmers, for it will not hearken, charm they never so wisely.

According to the text, before God Himself can save men, He has to open their ears, “Then he openeth the ears of men.” What! *Are men’s ears stopped?* Perhaps not their outward ears, there are comparatively few persons who are very deaf. The most of us can hear—we can hear the guineas jingle, and be after them very soon, we can hear a complaint against our fellow men, and repeat it very rapidly, we have very quick ears for some things that are not worth hearing. But towards God, men’s ears are often stopped. They are as if they had a film over them.

As there is a veil over the heart, and scales over the eyes, so is there a stopping in the ear, and none of us who preach the Word of the Lord can take out that stopping, or get through man’s ear to his heart. It is very hard that we should wear our lives away in constant thought of how to arrest and win men’s attention, and yet, though we may succeed in exciting an apparent attention for the moment, what we have said has not penetrated the heart. We have hurled our javelin at behemoth, and his scales have turned aside the shaft. We have done our best to arouse the conscience, and to fix truth in the heart, but if the arm of the Lord is not revealed, we have to go back, and cry with the Chief of the whole College of Preachers, “Who hath believed our report?”

What is this stopping that gets into men’s ears? It is, of course, first of all, original sin, that taint of the blood which has spoiled every human faculty, and has closed the ear from hearing even the voice of God Himself. Man does not hear God’s voice because he does not want to hear it. His will, his mind, his nature is altogether estranged from God.

This original sin engenders in men great carelessness about divine things. How quickly they are aroused by talk about politics! With what attention they will listen to a lecture upon matters relating to their health, or upon the fastest method of making money, but when it comes to the soul and its eternal destiny in heaven or hell, when it is concerning the bleeding Savior, and the loving Father, and the gentle wooing Spirit, men think we are doting, talking fancies, telling dreams, and they pooh-pooh it all, and cast it behind their backs. If it be a matter of any worth to them, they will possibly think of it tomorrow, but they scarcely imagine it is worth while to trouble themselves about it now. Their ears are stopped by carelessness.

Often, too, there is another form of stopping, which is very hard to get out of the ear, that is, worldliness. “I am too busy to attend to religion! I am so engaged that I cannot spare time to hear about it. You do not know how fully my time is occupied. Why, even on Sunday, I must needs look into my books, and balance my accounts!” With such men, the world is in their heart, it has filled it, and taken possession of all their thoughts. God is not in all their thoughts, because the world is there.

I have been told that you can scarcely hear the great clock at St. Paul’s strike in the middle of the day, the noise of the traffic is so great that many persons have lived near and have not known when it was noon, and I do not wonder at it. But you can hear the warning bell at dead of night, far away sounds the note that marks the hour because then the traffic is hushed. Alas! many men never get into that hush, they live in a noisy, clamorous, trafficking world, and this dulls and stops up their ears, so that even though God Himself speaks, they do not hear His voice.

In some cases, the ear is stopped up by prejudice. Men do not hear the Gospel because they do not want to hear it, they will not bring themselves to hear it. There is the preacher, for instance, they have heard such strange stories concerning him that they will not listen to him. The very people, too, who profess to love godliness—well, those who are prejudiced see faults in them—as if that were a reason why they should not themselves listen to the Gospel! But any excuse will suffice when you are not in earnest about anything. Yet it is a thousand pities that a man should be prejudiced against the salvation of his own soul. It would be a foolish thing for a man to prejudice himself into rags and beggary, but it is far worse when a man prejudices himself out of life eternal into everlasting woe.

There are tens of thousands, ay, millions, who, from their education and surroundings, and often from want of candor, would not listen to the Gospel though the angels themselves preached it. For some reason or other, they are prejudiced against angelic preaching, and they would not listen to it, let it be what it might. It seems impossible, sometimes, to get a hearing with some men, even for our Lord Himself. They have resolved, before they listen to Him, that He cannot be the Son of God. Nathanael's question, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" is on their lips in a moment. "Is it possible that we should derive any benefit from listening to the carpenter's Son?" So, in one way or another, their ear does not fulfill its true purpose, for it is stopped up by prejudice.

With a great many more, the ear seems to be doubly sealed up by unbelief. They will not believe that which God Himself has spoken. If they do not go the full length of renouncing belief in the inspiration of Scripture, yet they might as well, for they do not read what the Scripture saith, or if they do read, they read only to question and to cavil, to impose their own meaning upon the plain words of God, and so, in very truth, their ear is hermetically sealed with unbelief.

Even HE, you know whom I mean, even He who was wont to heal with a touch or a word all who came to Him, could not do many mighty works in His own country because of the unbelief of the people—with such an evil power is unbelief begirded. Oh, that God would save men from it! If they are to be saved, He must do it, for we cannot. When the ear is stopped up by unbelief, it matters not how wisely and how earnestly you proclaim the truth, it will not affect the heart of the hearers.

So, brethren, I have shown you various ways in which the ear of man gets stopped. It may also be stopped by self-sufficiency, when a man has enough in himself to satisfy him, he wants nothing of Christ. When he fancies he can do everything himself, what needs he to cry to the strong for strength?

Sometimes the ear gets stopped with the love of sin. Our Lord Jesus said to the Jews who sought to slay Him, "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" And I may say to others, "How can you who love the drunkard's cup believe in Christ? How can you believe in Christ, you who are unfaithful to your wives, or you young men who follow after evil and wantonness in these polluted streets of ours?" How is it to be expected that the pure Gospel should be in favor with men who are given to uncleanness?

These things stop men's ears so they say to the preacher, "If we attended to this Gospel, we could not go on in our sins, and we should be disturbed in our conscience, therefore we will hear you another day concerning this matter." When the days of their dalliance are over, and they have drained the cup of the world's pleasure and lust, when their bones are full of rottenness, and their sins are dragging them fast to perdition—then, peradventure, they will turn unto their God, but not now. Their ears are sealed with the love of sin, and with a hardness of heart which makes them impenitent for their iniquities.

O sirs, do you not see how difficult it is to get at man's heart when you cannot even get through the gate that leads to it? Ear-gate is blocked up with mud, and all the King's captains will fail to break a way through it unless the Prince Immanuel Himself shall come, with the irresistible battering ram of His almighty grace, and break down that gate by the sheer force of His omnipotent love.

Then there is another difficulty. If we get through the ear, and the man is influenced to listen, *his heart does not retain that which is good*, he so soon forgets it. Hence the text says of the Lord, "He opens the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction." Oh, what defeats we have had! I mean, we who are teachers and preachers from the pulpit, or you who give your instruction in the Sunday school class. Ah!

we think the child, the man, the woman, has learned that truth at last, but it is as much as if we had written it on a blackboard, it is soon wiped out. “Oh, yes!” we thought to ourselves, “we have put it so plainly, we have illustrated it so deftly, we have pressed it home so patiently and so earnestly, that they can never forget it.” Alas! what we tried to write upon their minds is as if it were written upon water, or like the marks that a child makes upon the sand by the seashore which the next wave washes out.

How shall men be saved? We cannot impress them, or if we do impress them, how often it ends in nothing! See them stream into the inquiry room. Note their tears, listen to the story of their repentance, hear their confessions and declarations that they have found the Savior. Read the report in the papers, so many saved!

But within six months, where are they? Are they to be found in our churches? Are they working with the people of God? Some of them, for whom God be thanked, but oh! how large a proportion have gone back, like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire! Would I not, therefore, have these special efforts to reach the unsaved? Of course I would, all the same for what I have said.

Whatever comes of it, our duty is one thing, the result of it is quite another. That which comes of it, is often so disappointing that we are made to realize our own utter inability, and then we are made to rely alone upon God’s all-sufficient ability. Unless He opens the ear, it is never opened, and unless He seals the instruction upon the heart, burning it into the conscience as with a hot iron, setting His own sign-manual upon the innermost core of the being—all that is done is soon undone, and nothing is really done effectually.

Another difficulty must be noticed, that is, *the purpose of so many men*, indeed, the secret purpose of all men, and from this purpose men have to be withdrawn. The purpose of most men, is to seek after happiness, and their notion is that they will find it by having their own way. They have not found it yet, their own way has led them into much sorrow. They purposed to amend especially in one particular direction, and still to follow their own way in another fashion. They were, perhaps, too coarse, they will now be more polite. They were really outrageous in their sin, they will now be more decorous. They were, perhaps, going at too fast a pace, they will go a little slower, but in the same direction, still seeking the pleasures of the world, still desiring to please self.

But to bow before God, and confess their sin—they will have none of that. To turn from all their evil ways, and to seek after perfect holiness—they will have none of that. To come to Christ, and in that coming to be obedient to His supremacy, and seek to follow His example, even as they hope to find pardon through His precious blood—they will not have that. Their purpose is—well, perhaps, just at the last, when they cannot make any more out of the world, they will come in, and cheat the devil in a low and beggarly way, and try to sneak into heaven by some back door if they can find one. After having given their lives to Satan, they will give their deaths to the Savior.

That prayer of the lowest man mentioned in the whole Bible, is one which I have often heard quoted with commendation. That wicked wretch of a Balaam, after hating God’s people, doing them all the evil he could, and taking the reward for it, then prays, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” What an abominable request! For the man who had lived such a life as that, to ask that he might die the death of the righteous was atrocious, and showed the awful blackness of his wicked heart.

O sirs, one day, you will have to come to Christ, and yield yourselves to His sway, if you do not bow before the scepter of His mercy, you will be broken in pieces by the rod of His wrath. The difficulty is to bring men to this submission now, ere it is too late. They have their own purpose, and their own hope, and their own scheme, and how can we get them away from them?

He that will not be healed, who can heal him? He that is resolved to be sick, who can make him whole? He that *will* die, who shall keep him alive? The man that will not eat, how can you feed him? He that will not drink, how can you slake his thirst? O sirs, this makes the difficulty of getting at men, that they are bent on mischief, they have set their faces like a flint, as if determined to go down to perdition!

Ay, and there is one more thing which is, perhaps, the greatest barrier of all. It is not merely their deafness of ear, and their un-retentiveness of spirit, and their resoluteness of purpose, but it is *their pride of heart*. Oh, this is like adamant, where shall we find the diamond that can cut a thing so hard as man's pride? God can "hide pride from man," but we cannot. Man is so proud that he says that he has not sinned, or if he has sinned, he could not help it, poor creature that he is. Even if he has done wrong, he is no worse than his neighbors, and there are some beautiful traits of character about him, and these will furnish a sufficient covering for him.

If he is told that he must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he greatly prefers to believe in himself. He will not come, as the publican did, and cry, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Why should he? He is not such a sinner as the publican was. He would be washed, but he does not feel that he is foul enough. He would be purified from sin, but then he is not quite certain that he has any sin from which he needs to be purified, and so, while the sick find the good Physician, and are healed, these who fancy themselves to be in health, die in their sins.

We can overcome almost anything but man's pride. You know the old story of dear Mr. Hervey, who said to the godly ploughman, "Ah, John, it is wonderful when God overcomes sinful self!" "Yes, Mr. Hervey," answered the ploughman, "but it is a greater wonder when He overcomes righteous self," and so it is. It is easy for the Lord to save a sinner, but it is impossible for a self-righteous man to be saved until he is brought down from his fatal pride.

I have heard of a lady who used to say that she could not bear to hear a certain style of preaching. "Why," she said, "according to that teaching, I have no advantage over the girls in the street, and there is no better heaven for a lady like me than there is for one of them!" So they shut themselves out with a sin which is as great as the sin which they condemn, for he that sets up his rags in preference to the robes of Christ, he that prefers his own righteousness to the precious blood of the Only-begotten, has insulted his God with an arrogance so terrible that no sin can equal it in blackness. God save us from that sin! It needs God to do so, for only He can "hide pride from man."

II. Now, secondly, though man is hard to influence, GOD KNOWS HOW TO COME AT HIM, and He does it in many ways.

According to the text, He sometimes does it, "in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings on the bed." I have no doubt that many, many times, *men's sleeping thoughts have been the beginnings of better things for them*. You see, reason holds the helm of the vessel when we are awake, and as a consequence, it keeps conscience down in the hold, and will not let him speak, but in our dreams, reason has quitted the helm, and then, sometimes, conscience comes up, and in his own wild way he begins to sound such an alarm that the man starts up in the night, his very hair standing on end with fear—a fear which might begin in a dream, but which was not itself a dream, for there was something real and substantial at the back of it.

Did you ever notice how God aroused Nebuchadnezzar, that greatest man, perhaps, of his age? Why, in a dream! Then Nebuchadnezzar trembles, and he sends for someone to interpret his dream. Many and many a man has dreamed of death, or dreamed of judgement, did you never have such a dream yourself? We do not attach any importance to dreams as prognostications or signs of our spiritual condition, but there can be no doubt that, frequently, conscience has been awake when the rest of the person has been asleep, and men have been startled in such a way that, when they did awake, they could not shake off the impress of their dreams.

God gets at other men in a different way, namely, *by affliction, or by the death of others*. What messengers of mercy afflictions have often been! The man has lost a dear babe, on whom his heart's affection was set, or oftener still, some blessed little child who talked of Jesus, and sang sweet hymns, and died with heaven on its face, has been the means of getting at an ungodly father and an impenitent mother. No sermon reached them, but the little child-preacher touched them wondrously, and for months, perhaps for years, they could not shake off the impression.

Some of you may remember other deaths, I will not harrow your feelings, but these death scenes have spoken loudly to you, and you have not been able to forget them. God has opened your ear, and I trust also that He has sealed His instruction upon your heart, and that He has hidden pride from you, and turned you from an evil purpose by means of personal afflictions or bereavements.

So have I known men aroused *by strange providences*, by a fire, for instance, or by being in peril on board ship. Oh, how many have fallen on their knees when the vessel has begun to go down, and ere the lifeboat has been descried! Bodily hunger too, has brought some to hunger for Christ, and the result of their sin, when they have been in poverty, forlorn and lonely, and when nobody would associate with them because of their sin, perhaps even the plank bed and the hardness of prison fare, have brought them to seek their Savior and their God.

God can get at men. Even the great leviathan, though no man can pierce him with a sword, has a weak place somewhere, where God can reach him. There is no sinner's heart so stout and stubborn but that, if God shall thrust at him, he shall soon find his heart melt like wax in the midst of his bowels. The eternal God never yet came into contact with men, either in the way of grace or vengeance, but He made them feel that He was not a man like themselves, with whom they could wrestle and contend, but that He was infinitely greater than the very strongest of them.

If God does not come at men by strange providences, how often He does it *by singular words from the preacher!* Oh, sometimes we have to say things which we never intended to say, they come to us, and we do not know whither they are going, and some who are not in the secret ask, "Why did the preacher say that?" Sirs, if he studied mere propriety, and wished to please all his hearers, he would not have said it, but he has said it, and God has blessed it. Awkwardly as it was put, it was put in the right shape, according to God's own way of looking at things, and sinners were saved, and God was glorified.

Then God has a way of coming to men's hearts by *personal visitations*, without dream, without speech, without voice. I have often heard one say, "It was many years since I had been to a place of worship, but when I rose in the morning, I felt a singular softness of spirit coming over me, and I said, 'I think I shall go, today, to hear such-and-such a man, and see if there will not be a word for me.'" Another has said, "I was at my work, and I cannot tell how it was, but I felt that I must stop a bit, and go aside, and begin to pray."

I remember one who is, I believe, at this moment a member of this church. He said, "I leaned against some iron railings, for I could hardly hold myself up. I never remember having any conviction of sin before, but I was suddenly struck with a sense of sin, I know not how nor why." God can bring men to Himself, so let us never despair of any. When you are praying for people, believe that there are other agencies than yours at the back of all that you can say, or I can say, and the books can say, and Bibles can say.

There is the Holy Ghost, and it is a part of our creed of which we ought often to think—"I believe in the Holy Ghost." Bring the sinner in prayer to the Holy Ghost, and rest you in this truth, that God can come at him by some means or other. Perhaps He will reach him through you, can you not speak to him tonight? Try and get a word with some stranger here, in the Tabernacle, speak an earnest, loving word about the Savior—and who knows?—the appointed time, the day of salvation for that soul, may have come. God grant it!

III. My time has gone, I shall, therefore, ask you to listen to the outline of what I would have said upon the third point, and that is, **WHEN GOD DOES GET AT MEN, HE ACCOMPLISHES GREAT PURPOSES.**

His purpose is, first, *to withdraw man from his own purpose*. We have often admired the drawings of God, let us also admire the withdrawals of God, "That he may withdraw man from his purpose."

Sometimes a man has purposed at a certain moment to commit a sin, and God stops him from doing it. Perhaps, if he had committed that one sin, the current of his life might have been turned so as never to be altered again, but God stopped him there and then. "Hitherto," says He, "you have gone; but you shall

go no further. That is your last oath, your last bout of drunkenness, your last act of uncleanness. Stop!" It is the Lord who does this, He did it with some of us, He withdrew us from our purpose.

He also withdraws men from their general purpose of continuing in sin. They purpose to procrastinate, but God purposes that they shall postpone the acceptance of grace no longer. They purpose that they will go a little further in sin, but God stops them there and then.

I find the translation may be that God withdraws man from his work, from that which has been his life-work, from the whole run and tenor of his conversation, God withdraws him. A man goes out after having received the Word of the Lord, and he is a different man from that hour. I remember one, who kept a low public house, and who heard the Word of God, and he had no sooner heard it than, when he reached home, he smashed up his signboard with the first axe he could find, and shut up the house, resolving that he would have no more to do with the evil traffic.

There is many a man who has been just as decided and earnest as that. God has stopped him, and withdrawn him from his purpose. Oh, there are some, whose lives have been spent in infamy, and in an instant God has made them forsake it all, and they have loathed themselves, and the change has been so sudden, as well as so radical, that all about them have gazed, and admired, and wondered at what the grace of God has wrought!

When the Lord visits a man's heart, He withdraws him from his purpose. I have it impressed upon me to believe that there is some soul here that is to be withdrawn from his purpose at once. I do not know what purpose you had upon your heart this afternoon, nor what your purpose is about where you are going to spend tonight, but I beseech you, if it was a purpose of sin, stop at once. Heed the word of warning, go no further.

If you have resolved tomorrow, or at any time during the week, that you will commit this or that sin, O love divine, turn the man, and he shall be turned! Deal with him this moment, O God, according to Your glorious Godhead, not according to the fickleness of his will, but according to Your almighty grace! Change the lion into a lamb, the raven to a dove! Thus, the Lord withdraws man from his purpose.

Then what else does God do? *He hides pride from man.* That is a very strange expression, certainly, to, "hide pride from man." Did none of you ever hide away a knife from a child? Have you never hidden away fruit from your little children when they have had enough, and they would have eaten more if they could find it? God often hides pride from men because if man can find anything to be proud of, he will be.

Look at him, he is proud of his fine form. Look at that woman, how proud she is of her clothes, poor thing! One is proud of his ability, proud of his success, proud of his situation, proud of his youth, proud of his old age, proud of what he never did, proud of what he did do but could not help doing. There is no one of us who has even a pennyworth of stuff to be proud of, whatever we may be, but unless God hides it all away, we go and find something, and come strutting out just like our little children, when they say, "See my pretty coat! see my new shoes!" Some of you mothers, in teaching your children to say that, bring them up to habits of pride.

Well, they will only be like yourself, and that is the way with us all, we will be proud, and he who has the least to be proud of is often prouder than all the rest. My Lord Mayor is not more proud of his badge and chain than many a crossing sweeper is of his ragged trousers. Pride can live upon a dunghill as well as upon a throne, but God will hide pride from us, till, if we look about, we cannot find it and cannot see any reason of being proud.

I pray God to hide from all of us self-righteous pride, and self-seeking pride, and self-glorifying pride, to lay us low at the foot of the cross. Whenever I find anybody saying, "I have attained to a perfectly sanctified life, I have no sinful propensities, I, I, I, I."— Ah, yes! if God had really dealt with you, He would have clipped your *I's* down. They will not be half so straight in the back, and so tall, when God takes you in hand.

He hides pride from men. Some of the Lord's workers have grown so big that the least thing offends them, everything must be according to their own way, or they will have nothing to do with it. Oh, it will not do, brothers and sisters! If God is with us, He will hide pride from man. There is nothing He dislikes more than pride, what does He say of it? "The proud he knoweth afar off." That is as much as to say that He will not touch them with a pair of tongs. He knows enough of them at a distance, He does not want them near Him. When He deals with us in the way of grace, He hides pride from man.

Then, lastly, He thus *secures man's salvation from destruction*. "He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." How wonderfully has God kept some of us back from what would have been our destruction if we had gone on! Perhaps I speak to some here who have had many hairbreadth escapes, should not they live to God?

I recollect with what solemn awe I spoke to an officer who rode in the famous charge at Balaclava. It must be twenty years ago or more, I think, since I was with him, and he was telling me of that terrible ride when the saddles were emptying on every side, and he rode on, and rode back unharmed. I could not but lay my hand upon him with great earnestness and say, "Are you not God's man, since He spared you so? Will you not live to His glory and give your heart to Him?" And I would say that to all of you who have been in fevers oft, or who have been near the gates of death.

If you have been preserved, for what purpose was it? Surely, that you might yield yourselves to God, for He has interposed on purpose that your life should not go down to the pit. I hope also that He has the higher design that you yourselves, with your truest life, should never go down into that pit from which there is no escape.

Oh, that He would deliver every man, and woman, and child here, from the wrath to come, for, believe me, there is a wrath to come, a fire that burns, and shall never be quenched! Oh, for that visitation of God, that shall hide pride from us, and reveal a Savior to us, that shall withdraw us from our own purpose, to fulfill in us the divine purpose! Then shall we be saved from going down into the pit. The Lord enable us to believe in His dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOB 33:6-33

This is part of the speech of young Elihu, who had listened with much patience, but also with great indignation, to the harsh speeches of Job's three friends, and to Job's self-righteous answers.

Verses 6-7. *Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.*

Job had wished that he could argue his case with the Lord Himself. If God would only withdraw the terror of His presence from him, he would like to come even to His seat, and plead with Him. "Oh!" said he, "that there were one who would stand between me and God, that I might plead with him!" "Here am I," answered Elihu, "I am the man you want. God has sent me; now come, and plead with me. There is no terror in me to make thee afraid; neither have I any heavy hand to crush you."

8-10. *Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy,—*

Elihu puts the case very plainly. "There, Job, you have said that you are perfectly innocent, and yet you are made to suffer. You have brought a charge against God, that He seeks occasion against you, and treats you, who have always been His faithful friend, as though you were His enemy. You said,"—

11-12. *He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.*

Here is the core of the whole matter. Whenever you and I begin to impugn the justice of God, we ought to remember who we are, and what He is. There is no comparison between us and the great God over all, blessed forever, and for us to begin to charge Him with injustice, or unkindness, is a desperately wicked action, of that we may be quite sure at the very outset.

13. *Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.*

It is not for us to summon God to appear before us, as if He were our servant, and we were His master, or to arraign Him before our judgment seat, and to sit there as if the Holy One of Israel were a felon, who must answer for His crimes. It is high treason, and blasphemy against the Most High for us to think of sitting in judgment upon Him.

This was Paul's way of putting the matter when someone raised a question about the divine decree. Paul did not answer the objector, except by saying, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Let the moth contend with the flame, let the wax fight with the fire, let the stubble strive with the whirlwind, but as for us who are less than nothing, let us have no disputes with God. The fact is, God's dealings with us have an objective, He treats us sometimes with stern severity for our good. We cannot always see the end from the beginning, but God has an end, and a gracious end too, in all His dealings with His people.

14-22. *For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.*

Yet in all this, God is dealing with man in love and mercy. Man is a strange creature, he will not go in the right way by being drawn, so full often he must be driven. There is a whip for a horse, a bridle for an ass, a rod for a fool's back, and we are such fools that we must often feel that rod, and sometimes to a very painful extent, till our soul draws near unto the grave, and our life to the destroyers.

23-24. *If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious to him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.*

Oh, what precious words! There is One with God, One of a thousand, the Chief among ten thousand, the Messenger of the covenant, the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. When He comes in, and makes man to see God's wondrous mingling of justice and mercy, then God turns in infinite grace upon the starving, dying sinner, and says, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

25-28. *His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*

Some Thursday nights ago, there strayed into this place one who had long hated God, and who had openly expressed his hatred of Him. He was much prayed for by friends, but he was desperate in his wickedness. He little dreamed, when he left his home, that he would come into this place, but so he did, and here in this house God met with him, and renewed his heart, and made him to rejoice in the God he once despised. Here was a fulfillment of this text, and I pray that it may be fulfilled again tonight.

29-33. *Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living. Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.*

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—126, 785, 63 (SONG 3)

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